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STATE PARK

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THE PARK

Fox Ridge State Park, located eight miles south of Charleston, is interlaced by steep, wooded ridges and broad, rich valleys, with occasional openings in the forest where recreational facilities can be found. State Route 130 passes by the 864 acre park.

In sharp contrast to the flat prairies of the east central section of Illinois, Fox Ridge is a heavily wooded tract of land with rolling hills along the bluffs of the Embarras (pronounced "Am-braw") River.

In 1938 and 1939, the State of Illinois took over the management and ownership of Fox Ridge, then a small parcel of land. Citizens from the Charleston area helped to preserve this area as a state park.

HISTORY

Pioneers: Much of the pioneer life of this area was centered around the Embarras River. It provided a main source of transportation, fishing, trapping and, of course, water. Before the development of the railroad, much of the economy of the region depended on the river. Flatboats carried cargoes of livestock, hoop poles for the manufacture of barrels and many other products downstream to the Wabash, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and often to New Orleans.

Indians: The presence of prehistoric Indian cultures is confirmed by the many arrowheads which have been found along the riverbank and a stone ax which was unearthed when the large shelter was built. The early historic tribes of the area included the Piankeshaw and the Illinois, both of whom were pushed out when the Kickapoo migrated into this area from Wisconsin in the late 1600's. Several skirmishes are on record between the Kickapoo and settlers of the Fox Ridge area.

CCC: Fox Ridge was one of the Illinois state parks where the Civilian Conservation Corps provided a work force. The residence/workshop complex, the Natural History Survey laboratory, the dam and spillway, the large brick pavilion and four miles of hiking trails were constructed. Due to the efforts of the CCC's the park system was advanced by a decade.



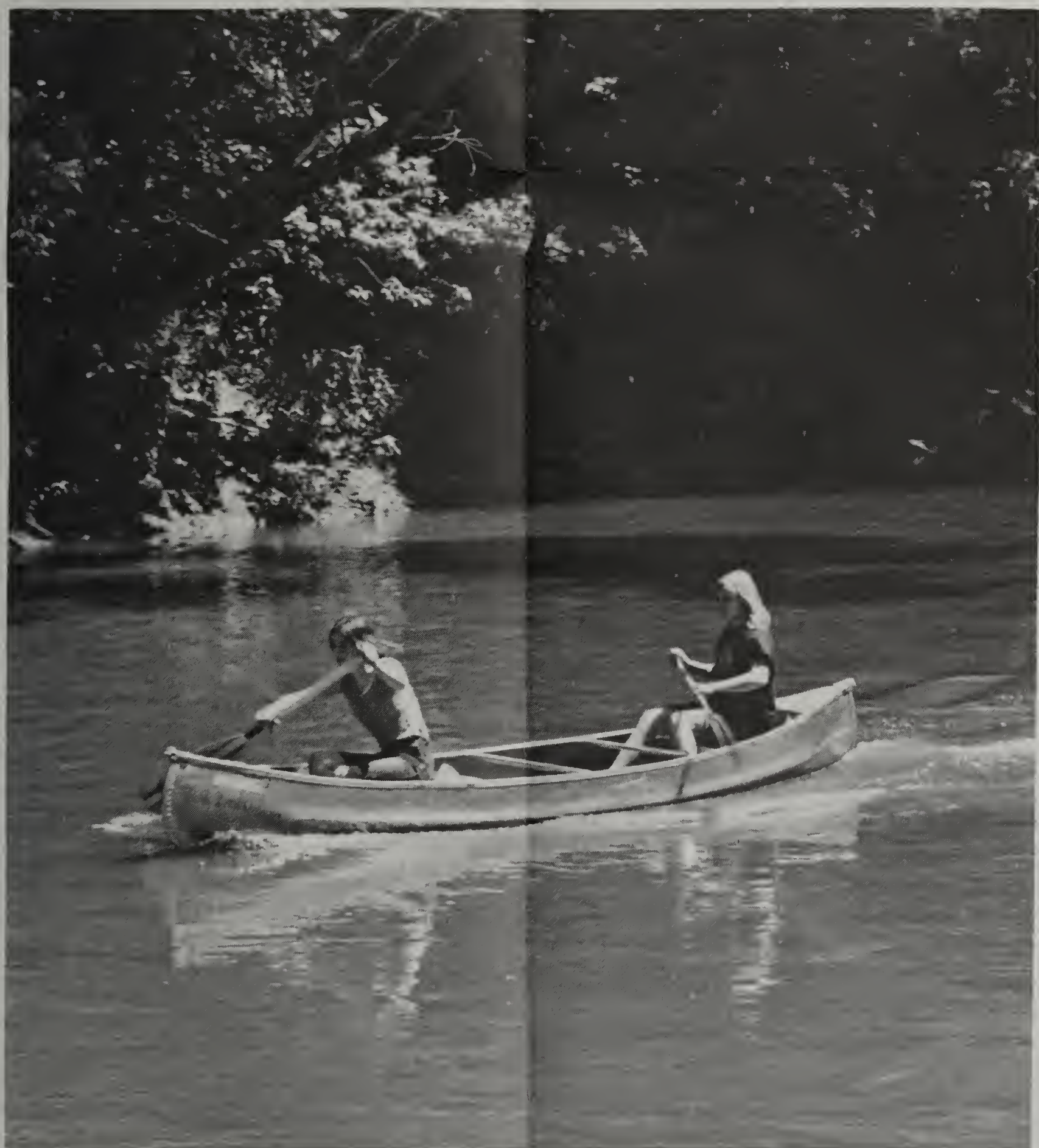
THE LAKE

Ridge Lake, a man-made lake of 18 acres, is administered by the Illinois Natural History Survey, Urbana. The lake is used for limnological investigation designed to improve fishing in Illinois lakes. Present studies at the lake include effects of lake drawdowns and supplemental feeding. On the south shore of the lake is a red brick laboratory building which was completed in 1941.

Ridge Lake has a maximum depth of 25 feet and a shore line of 1.1 miles. The dam is constructed principally of the relatively impervious yellow clay forming the walls of the valley. The dam is 385 feet long and 29 feet wide at the crest. A concrete spillway, 87 feet wide, at the north end of the dam carries off surplus water. This was the first lake at which Natural History Survey technicians were able to control the water level.

THE NATURAL SCENE

Fox Ridge offers the park visitor an abundance of plant and animal life. The mature mixed hardwood forest covering most of the park yields a splendor of beauty during all seasons of the year. Winter birds and animals can be seen among trees and snow-covered ridges, which six months later will offer dense vegetation and a different array of summer wildlife inhabitants.



In the spring, the hillsides are alive with a panorama of wildflowers and blooming, budding trees serve as resting spots for migrating birds. The fall offers a brilliant display of colors as nature enhances the woodlands with hues of yellow, red and orange.

Fox Ridge is used as an outdoor education laboratory by Eastern Illinois University and other schools in the area because of its interesting natural features.

FACILITIES

Picnicking: There are many designated picnic areas throughout the park with tables and grills. Cooking may be done only on park or camp stoves. Ground fires are not permitted. Toilet facilities and drinking water are readily available in all areas. A large, brick outdoor pavilion and four smaller shelters are available for reunions and group gatherings. Playgrounds and a ball diamond are within walking distance of the pavilion and shelters.

Camping: There is a Class C camping area for trailers and a Class D camping area with foot access only designated for tents. Picnic tables, cooking grills, drinking water, toilet facilities and a sanitary dumping station are located in the campground. In addition, there is a group camping area which will accommodate tents.

Canoeing: The Embarras River flows by Fox Ridge and there is a take out point. However, it is for the hardy canoeist who is willing to pack his gear and canoe and walk about 300 yards to the nearest parking area. The Embarras is a very scenic river due to the rich plant and animal life in the river valley. During the summer the water may be too shallow--be sure to contact the site before canoeing the Embarras.

Fishing and Boating: Ridge Lake contains bluegill, largemouth bass, and channel catfish. Lake fishing is allowed only by reservation which is done by contacting the I.N.H.S. laboratory at the lake (217-345-6490) or by writing Fox Ridge State Park, Route 1, Charleston, Illinois, 61920. Fishing hours are 6 to 10 a.m. and 3 to 8 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Fishing is permitted at Ridge Lake from April through October. Only boats available free at the lake may be used.

River fishing is available at any time to the hardy angler who is willing to descend the steep slopes to the Embarras River. Lake Charleston, about four miles from the park, is also recommended for fishing.

Hiking: Approximately 6 miles of trails meander through the park taking the visitor to many scenic areas. There are trail head entrances describing the trail to assist the visitor. The trail system is the natural focus of the park due to the rich, abundant plant and animal life. By staying on the designated trail system, one may see many items of interest from wild deer to many different varieties of plant life. The trail system has nine wooden stairways, totalling 1200 feet and 18 wooden bridges. Rest benches and litter barrels are also located on the trails. Your cooperation by staying on the marked trails and by not removing flowers, ferns, shrubs and trees, so others may enjoy the same experience, will be appreciated.

Hunting: Fox Ridge has approximately 180 acres open to public hunting. The hunting area is located one mile north and three miles west of the main entrance of Fox Ridge. There is no check station, but there is a survey card to be filled out by the hunter. Fox Ridge has a fact sheet available to the hunter showing the boundary lines and describing the area and species most abundant in the area. Please remember to respect public and private property as if it were your own. Shotgun and bow and arrow are the only weapons to be used on this area.

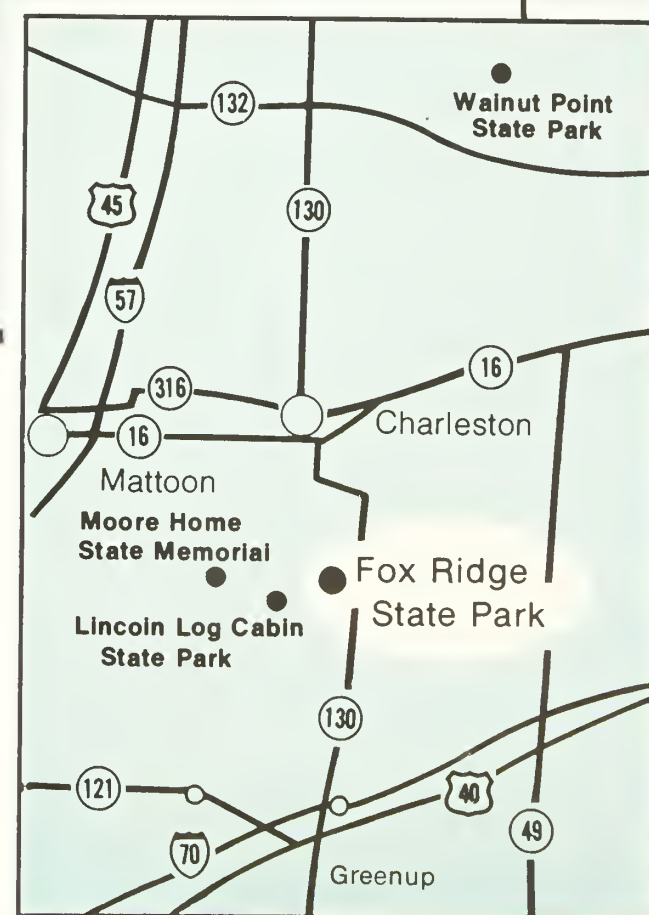
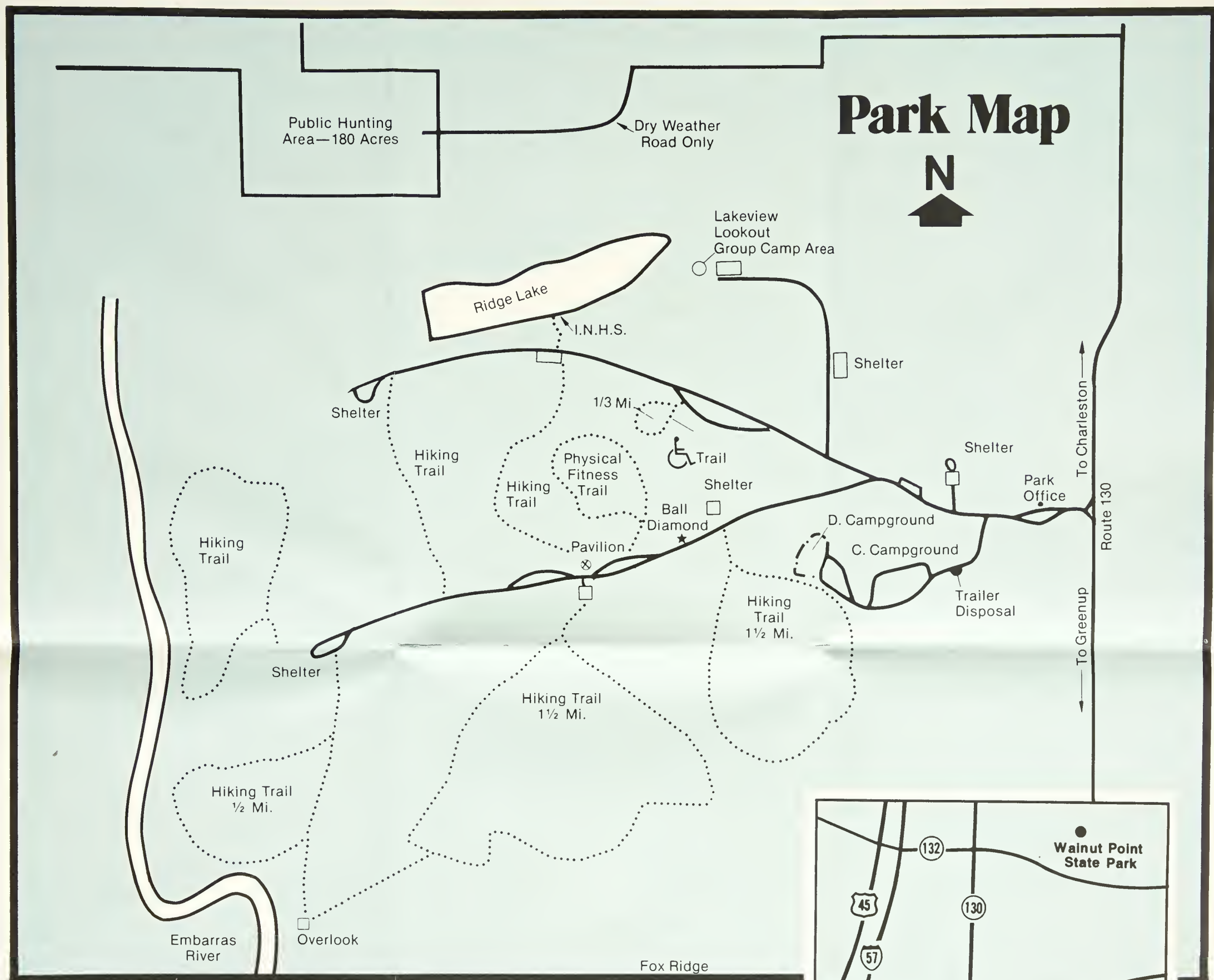
Interpretation: Beginning Memorial Day weekend and ending Labor Day weekend, an interpretive program is conducted each Saturday. Morning, afternoon and evening sessions are offered to the public with emphasis on nature, arts and crafts, and movies shown. A schedule of events is available at the park office and is also posted at several informational boards.

Concession Stand: A concession is in operation from April to October offering sandwiches, soft drinks, ice, firewood and some camping supplies. The concessionaire also offers catering to group gatherings as a service. For additional information, contact the park office or the concessionaire. Operating hours are posted.

Fox Ridge Foundation: A foundation has been initiated for persons who enjoy the park and would like to donate funds for improving it. The Fox Ridge Foundation is governed by local citizens interested in the park's future. Contributions may be earmarked for specific or general park improvements. For more information, please contact the Site Superintendent.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Groups of 25 or more persons will not be admitted to any state site unless permission from the site manager has been obtained to use the



facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state sites are within easy access of every part of Illinois. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Giant City, and Pere Marquette and White Pines Forest has cabins and dining rooms. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

All state sites are open the year round, except on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to facilities is by foot only.

For more details, contact Site Manager, R.R. 1, Charleston, Illinois 61920, phone 217/345-6416. For information on other state sites, write the Department of Conservation, Land and Historic Sites, 524 S. Second Street, Springfield, Illinois 62706.



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